

## Adapting Self Defense to Wheelchair Use An Interview with Clyde Caceres

Interview by Gila Hayes

*Wars in the Middle East increased the numbers of amputees and people with varying degrees of paralysis. As a result, there's been more blogging and articles about wheelchair gun carry in recent years. Forgotten, I fear, were the more senior people who lost mobility or were paralyzed after an illness or accident. In February, I was privileged to speak at length with lifetime martial artist, accomplished shooter, instructor, and longtime contributor to the self defense and law enforcement industries, Clyde Caceres. I learned a lot and want to share that conversation with members. Enjoy a longer video version at <https://youtu.be/MKeUOY-8vFw>.*



Clyde Caceres discusses self defense from a wheelchair. Click the picture if you prefer our more casual video interview format.

**eJournal:** Can you give us a brief bio highlighting your martial arts involvement and the accomplishments of your work in the gun world with an eye towards exploring the foundations of your self-defense principles?

**Caceres:** It's been something I've been doing for decades and decades. I used to study martial arts very intensively and opened my own school. When more and more law enforcement people came to train, I found myself working more with retention and disarming and skills like that. Eventually, that led me to join a police force part-time, which opened doors for me in the firearms world to work with people like you and your husband, to be able to become, for instance, a Glock law enforcement firearms instructor and a whole lot of other things that I was able to pursue.

**eJournal:** I'm proud to say I shared some of those experiences with you. Now, let's fast forward to today. In researching and preparing our interview, I had enormous trouble calling you a stroke "victim" or a paralysis "sufferer" or any of the host of other words that are in ordinary vocabulary. "Victim" was really not accurate! Do those words apply? How do you see yourself and how has that changed over the last 6-8 months?

**Caceres:** Disabled or handicapped are very standard words from which I boldly shy away. I tend to use mobility-restricted or mobility-limited, instead. That's just my own personal point of view. When I woke up in the hospital in Hamilton, Ontario, July 5, 2023, obviously something was wrong. They did tests

to confirm a stroke. About three o'clock the next morning in the hospital bed, I realized my whole left side wasn't working at all. It was clear several hours later that my whole left side was just out of commission. I thought about several things. I thought: One, I still have capability. I still have a purpose. I still have a mission and I'm going to stay strong. My faith helped guide me.

I also realized that I had to do a couple of things. I had to keep my right side strong because it's the only side that works. I also had to keep my core strong, so I started doing crunches in the hospital bed the night after my stroke. The nursing staff came in looking at me like, what are you doing? I told them what I was doing.

I told myself that I was going to come out of this stronger than going in. I thought about weird little things. I kept my wallet in my left pocket. I needed to move it to my right pocket and when I pull it out, how was I going to open it and take out credit cards or money? That's not core strength; manipulating a wallet needs dexterity. I told myself, by the time I get out of the hospital, I'm going to be able to manipulate my wallet and wipe my own butt. I accomplished both.

**eJournal:** While your mindset was key, you were also physically fit before the stroke. I wonder how a less fit individual would adapt daily tasks, to say nothing of modifying self-defense techniques around reduced mobility. With age, most experience diminished strength or flexibility. What are your thoughts on adapting to less physical capacity than we once had?

**Caceres:** I think you need to mentally come to grips with it. The physical limitations are going to vary between people. There are people in way worse condition than I'm in. I anticipate getting better and healing, but several months ago, I asked what if this is my condition? What am I going to do with it? Where do I need to be? That's where [ChairRider.com](https://ChairRider.com) was born.

**eJournal:** What is [ChairRider.com](https://ChairRider.com)?

**Caceres:** Very early one morning in October I was sitting drinking coffee in the living room when a thought came, "What if I am like this for good? What if my limitations are what they are?" Hopefully, I'll be able to will myself to walk again and be

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blessed to recover, but I might be in a chair, and this might be the limits of my mobility. Then I thought, what am I going to do?

I'm not going to give up! My wife will tell you that even prior to the stroke, whenever she brought up the idea of sitting on the porch in a rocking chair, I'd run! I'd say, "No, that's not going to be me!" I don't golf, I don't fish, so now I thought, "What am I going to do?"

I have a background in defensive tactics, be that with your hands or with equipment. I have a background in manufacturing life-saving tools – Crimson Trace lasers, DKX body armor, et cetera, and I have a background in training people. I've taught thousands and thousands of civilians, as well as law enforcement and military. I thought, "Why don't I start doing defensive tactics for wheelchair bound people?" That is how ChairRider.com came about and it grew into more than purely defensive tactics. While there's an element of defensive tactics within my program, it's really to build a community of empowered people through information, through products and through training to make them stronger and give them more functionality and power. That's what ChairRider.com is.

**eJournal:** There is a fine line between acceptance and surrender.

**Caceres:** Like I said, people need to come to grips with reality. It helps if you have faith, and then you work within your limitations and try to expand your capabilities. I work out hard in physical therapy three times a week. I push myself. I'm only making incremental improvement and it's kind of frustrating. You know what your limitations currently are, and you can reflect on what you could do and use that as a goal and mission to try and achieve some semblance of your prior capabilities and then adapt in order to overcome. I've done a ton of adapting.

**eJournal:** For example?

**Caceres:** If I need something that's up high, for instance, I force myself to stand, catch my balance, and reach for it. If something falls or my wife drops something on the floor, I'm constantly saying, "Leave it; I'll get it." Fortunately, I'm still flexible, so I reach down and pick up anything that falls on the floor – the cap off a water bottle or a piece of paper.

For physical fitness, besides working out at physical therapy three times a week, I try to use my muscles every time I do something, whether I'm leaning or going forward or stretching. I try to use my muscles constantly to keep them toned.

**eJournal:** That's inspirational and leads into the nuts and bolts of what I was hoping to learn from you today. How do you distill or apply the principles on which defensive tactics rely for chair riders? How did you work through principles like moving to the position of advantage or create leverage that powers a control

technique? How did you distill and apply those principles to working out of a wheelchair? Or have you completely rewritten the book?

**Caceres:** I wouldn't say rewritten, but I'm extrapolating things that work, and I look at things that don't work and wonder why. How it can be enabled? What workarounds do I need? I'm constantly adapting and overcoming and doing workarounds because of my left side immobility.

Agility is a thing of the past. I have to rely on the wheelchair's capability in terms of pivots, movement, advancing, withdrawing, and that's a big limitation. Awareness is huge now because I can't jump back and react to something. It takes me a while to react, so I need a little more anticipation. My mobility is slow right now, so awareness is critical; distance is critical. I use my verbal abilities to engage people in a friendly manner, but also to verbally push people a little bit away from me if they're too close and I sense that they're encroaching in my space for nefarious reasons.

**eJournal:** In self defense we tend to prioritize. First, I'm aware, then I've got verbal intervention, avoidance, evasion and escape, if not, escapes from grabs, weapons use and on up. Does the wheelchair re-prioritize things?

**Caceres:** Absolutely. It really does. I ask people in classes, "What is the most important rule of self defense?" They say bigger guns or more ammo. The reality that I put forward is that it is better to be somewhere else. Be somewhere else.

Evasion and avoidance start early when you anticipate where you're going and what you're going to be doing. In a wheelchair, I constantly have to think about access. I must be constantly aware of little things like the weight or heaviness of a door, or whether I am able to get through a parking lot. There are all kinds of variables that come into play. On ChairRider.com, I wrote that my three-dimensional world is now two dimensional. My two-dimensional world is what's ahead of me and what's under me. I must be constantly aware of that.

**eJournal:** Planning your outing in such detail reminds me of something Marcus Wynn described when I was privileged to interview him before he passed away. He talked about preplanning, about preloading commuting and drive time. He was in Minneapolis. It was dangerous, very dangerous. He said, before you go out the front door, before you enter transition zones, you must work through where you're going to go, how to get there, what you're going to do upon arrival, what you need to see and avoid. His interview is at <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/avoiding-attacks-while-driving>. Marcus' teachings echo how you've adapted now that you can't presume you'll find good parking or know whether the parking lot has deep gravel or is full of potholes.

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**Caceres:** Exactly, exactly. Maybe I can't find a parking space that's close to where I need to be and it's raining. Maybe I'm at the wrong entrance to a building, so I've got to get back to my vehicle, load the wheelchair back up, climb into the vehicle and find the right entrance. There's just a lot of little things that I never thought of seven or eight months ago. I would see the wheelchair signs and handicap access and I would think, "Oh, that's good. I'm glad they have that," but you know, I had no relationship to it. Now I do.

I'm constantly preparing ahead of time. Where am I going to go? Have I been there before? Do I know my route there or is it someplace new? Do I need to call ahead and ask if they have access instructions for me? I'm trying to get in the habit of taking pictures of businesses that are wheelchair friendly, that try to accommodate people, that are more than just compliant with the Americans with Disability Act of 1990, which is mostly suggestions, not statutory and doesn't have "teeth."

**eJournal:** Can we outline circumstances in ordinary life where a wheelchair rider feels the greatest threat to personal safety and then cover some solutions? Maybe a couple of examples would be useful.

**Caceres:** The people who live there are just one of the reasons we're moving to a town of population 800 in Illinois farm country. They're just overwhelmingly supportive and helpful. The other reason is safety. It's a town where kids still leave their bicycles out in the yard. Nobody locks their doors. I ride around the town on my power chair very easily to do normal chores like banking or the post office and things like that. I'm bringing that up because my sense of threat where I live right now is almost zero.

That changes when I go to bigger towns of 30,000 people, 40,000 people, 100,000 people. I stay away from Chicago. I have absolutely no use for it. I'm sorry if some of you live in Chicago; I won't, because I don't want to be at heightened alert level every time I walk out my door or even in my own house. I've positioned myself to be presumably safer. So that's one aspect of my "be somewhere else" protocol.

**eJournal:** What about height? For years, we operated with our eyes about five feet up. When you're in a seated position out in public, does your danger scan change what you see and how you react to what's coming down the sidewalk? A common concern expressed by chair riders is being pulled or knocked from the chair.

**Caceres:** Yes, I keep my head on a swivel. I scan even more now than I used to. My awareness of people's activities, eye contact and gestures, is even more acute. I live where carrying a gun is restricted, so I equip myself with other tools. I maintain distance and with that comes awareness, looking for avenues of flight, and looking for who can be of assistance, because the

dangers are not just interpersonal. The dangers include going over a curb somewhere and tipping over.

I've fallen three times now. Fortunately, I haven't hurt myself. Shortly after I got home from the hospital, I fell. The next day in physical therapy I said, put me on the ground and teach me how to get up. I don't want to be that whiny guy pushing the "I've fallen, and I can't get up" button or whining, "Please, somebody, help me, help me, help me." Sometimes I need help and people have been gracious and helpful, but I want to be able to overcome as much as I can.

You asked about going to the ground and grappling. I wouldn't want to, so I need distance and to keep threats at bay with whatever means are necessary to stop aggressive behavior. If I get ambushed, I'm willing to do whatever is necessary to fight and claw my way through it. Hopefully, I'll have a weapon close that I can use or have extreme close quarter tactics and higher level of response available so I'm not trying to fight one-handed from the ground.

One of my limitations is fighting with one arm. I have a hard time rolling to positions that I used to be able to get into. Little things like flipping over in bed that I didn't even think about before are hard. I have slept on my back for seven months now. Every so often I try to wiggle myself over to be prone. It's really very hard.

**eJournal:** That's realistic and emphasizes how important it is not to over-estimate what is possible. Let's segue briefly into firearms and techniques and tactics that fit into your reality today, without use of your left side. Do you remember how often we who avidly train in self-defense gun use have worked on one-handed techniques? We clear semi-auto malfunctions one-handed, and reload one-handed, and do a lot of one-handed shooting. Thank God for the training, because any one of us could lose left- or right-side function at any time. How practical have you found our drills like racking a semi-auto slide by catching the ejection port or the sights on a belt, stiff clothing, or the corner of an object? Have you done any work with those methods? How practical are they?

**Caceres:** They are not just practical, but necessary. I found my knees are important for clamping things like a jar to be able to twist it. I use my teeth! Just this morning I was trying to pay bills and was trying to pull the innards out of an envelope with one hand until I just took the back end of the envelope, bit it, pulled the innards out and threw the envelope away. You adapt with parts of your body that you never would have considered before.

Regarding firearms, I oftentimes resort to a revolver. My reload is a second revolver because I tried speed loaders and speed strips and while I can put a revolver between my knees and

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reload, there's nothing fast, nothing at all quick, about it. Our good friend, may he rest in peace, Jim Cirillo used to call that the New York reload. For me, that's become more than just a funny story. It has become reality.

Regarding auto-loading pistols, I do have to use something to rack the slide. I use a cross draw holster, and from there, I can dump an empty mag. I can put it between my knees and reload when I need to.

One-handed shooting is critical. I'm going to get a five-pound dumbbell to exercise one arm projection, simulating a firearm. I used to do a lot of construction and remodeling, but now even my right arm is not worked out daily. I'm going to use a five-pound dumbbell to exercise.

**eJournal:** I wonder also about drawing while seated in a wheelchair. What about crossing your legs with a loaded gun? Did that change your gun handling? How did you adapt?

**Caceres:** A lot of other people are limited by loss of torso mobility. A lot of traditional carry is on the belt at five o'clock or so. Because I have torso mobility, I can draw from there, but it's sometimes uncomfortable when I'm sitting. A friend of mine was paralyzed from the chest down by an IED. He doesn't have the mobility to do things like this [*mimes drawing from behind the hip*]. Another acquaintance, former military, went down in a helicopter crash. He can't feel, so he got pressure sores from holster rub and didn't know it. These issues become important. I'm fortunate that I can feel and that I can move my torso.

Four or five years ago, I'd transitioned to appendix carry. Now I use a cross draw holster. Visualize yourself standing, even in appendix carry, the muzzle's pretty much pointed at the floor. When you draw, if you're careful, you do not sweep your own body. From a standing position, it's relatively safe. In a seated position where your legs are sticking out in front of you, drawing from appendix carry points the muzzle at your legs. In a cross draw, the holster is pointing slightly off my hips. As I draw, an unintentional discharge or gun malfunction would not hit the femoral artery even if it grazed me.

I also have gone back to a fanny pack because strapped across my chest, it's in a perfect location. Access to my firearm is simply ripping the zipper open and accessing it and coming out with it. Muzzle angle and direction and so forth are safe. For off-body carry, whether it's a fanny pack or a sling bag, it goes diagonally over my body. Access like this has becoming more and more important to me because it's difficult to get my wallet, my pocketknife, and other things out from where I would normally carry them, so everything's in here. Wallet, sometimes firearms, a zippered pocket for my mobile phone and charging cord, my flashlight, folding knife, Chapstick, reading glasses, things like that. [*Grinning*] They're all in my man purse.

**eJournal:** I like how you move that cross draw up and down center line as needed, since you've kept the same orientation

regardless of whether the holster bag is in your lap or higher up on your chest. I like the uniformity in where your hand has to go plus the ability to get a strong, high firing grip in whatever is serving as the holster.

This is really good, and I appreciate you sharing how you worked through those details. Returning to one-handed shooting, how is recoil management? Do you shoot a .357 Magnum revolver, for example, or a very lightweight scandium revolver for ease of carry? How are you coping with recoil?

**Caceres:** I carry a Model 642 Smith & Wesson in .38 Special. I am reminded of one of the most shocking recoil incidents I've ever had. It was kind of funny. I was up at the Smith & Wesson factory when they were introducing the .500 Smith & Wesson with a snubby barrel. Being manly, I said, "Yeah, I'll shoot that." I loaded, braced myself almost horizontal, fired one round and felt the shock wave through my hands, arms and shoulders. I opened the cylinder and put it down. I thought I was really being a wuss. Afterwards, I had lunch with Todd Jarrett and Ernest Langdon, two of the top shooters in the country. I said, "Hey, what do you guys think of that snubby .500?" They looked at me and said, "What? Do you think we're stupid? We're not going to shoot that gun!" I realized recoil mitigation is important.

I've always taught that follow-up shots are important. How much time between shots is important. I've always preached that. I have for years advocated 148 grain, wadcutter target loads, especially for elderly people, people with carpal tunnel or tiny people, because I'd rather have them fire two or three shots of 825 feet per second flat, big cross section bullets at an adversary and have quick recovery, than to shoot one "magic" 125-grain jacketed hollow point and close their eyes every time they fired a shot from the gun. I've been talking to Rob Garrett and hear that the light load wad cutter is making a comeback with that intent in mind. They're being produced by Georgia Arms, I think.

Yes, I look at it a little differently. Unless the bad guy is totally messed up on PCP, he's not going to want to get shot. I may be off target here, but hopefully the disincentive, getting somebody to stop and back up, will be impactful with virtually any round. If not, the recovery time and sight acquisition between multiple rounds becomes quicker and more immediate with less recoil. I tend to try to keep away from rather than to try to cope with major recoil issues. That's my own way of looking at things.

**eJournal:** There's room at the table for people with lots of different needs. No one is going to look down on you for the wadcutters.

Talking about holsters, carry ammunition and other adaptations raises the idea of mentoring and beyond the inspiring example that you already are. I know you are talking with and guiding

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people very effectively because it is not theoretical if you say, "Here's my experience. I think you would do better with a .38 Special or .32 ACP." There are so many options. What about options like pepper sprayer, pepper gel use?

**Caceres:** As far as self defense goes and the ability to defend oneself out of a chair, I think ultimately a handgun is a very viable tool, especially if you live where there are flagrantly violent people. Sometimes lethal force is appropriate and even the best option.

I also definitely believe, as you do, in gradients of response, whether it's verbal or whether it's audible – although I'm not so big on the whistle because you can't talk while you have a whistle in your mouth. I'm building other ways, like a small piece of lightweight armor I'm carving out that fits my pack. It is Level IIIA, which stops up to up to .44 Magnum. I'm trying to devise ways of putting kits together for people that are more concerned about acute dangers in their neighborhood. An edged weapon is also a good close quarter tool to get out of the grasp of someone.

I'm not a big proponent of stun guns because they require intimate contact. You have to either close the distance or wait until the threat closes the distance. Neither works for me. TASER®s are a little bit complicated. Even in law enforcement, a TASER® is always supported by lethal force – there are guns backing it up.

I've long been a huge proponent of pepper spray. It doesn't work all the time, but it works most of the time. The ability to keep people back, to keep them, say at 10 feet or further away is really a strong goal of what we do. There's the mechanical part with using your hands and feet or whatever you're capable of and then there are weapons like pepper spray that push people away. There are fogs, there are foams, there is gel, there is spray, and everybody has to do their own research based on their environment, little things like how windy it is in the area where you tend to be mobile. There are pluses and minuses to each of those different delivery systems.

**eJournal:** I read about something I'm not sure is practical or impractical, but you would know. Are you doing any work with ramming, even with the footrests on the chair? How much is the chair an element in your defense?

**Caceres:** The ramming part is not really practical because there usually isn't enough torque. If I had both arms mobile, then maybe I could shove myself and that might work to ram it into somebody's shins. But again, that requires closing the gap. If somebody is four feet away and I try to ram them, that means I'm within their arms' reach, but it may work.

If somebody is already on top of you, you may be able to evade, but generally there isn't enough immediate torque in a mechanical chair or power chair to launch yourself. I suppose

the makers don't want people getting whiplash every time they press the toggle. I'd like a ton more torque! I saw a video of a guy that converted his power chair and clocked himself doing 55 miles an hour in a power chair that normally goes 5-6 miles an hour. I don't recommend anybody should try that at home.

**eJournal:** *[laughing]* No. About what other aspects of wheelchair use are most of us missing the point?

**Caceres:** There are some other mobility issues that come about by being in a chair. One, your ability to scan is greatly reduced because you can't turn your whole torso or even your hips. Your ability to react is hampered because of the torque curve on a chair or because gripping and pulling with your arm takes time. One of the biggest limitations that I've discovered is to be able to protect your six. Maybe if you had a little mirror or a little camera, you could see if somebody approaching, but if you didn't, you'd have to somehow be alert to the approach and I can't just spin around and change my footing like you do on foot. If you've got to turn the wheelchair around and face your six, on a concrete floor it probably takes three seconds but if you're in grass, sand, heavy carpet or gravel, you could be stuck there for several more seconds trying to turn around.

I have been working on how to address your six. You remember one of the things of which I have been a huge proponent for a number of years is the correct use of a laser sighting system. One thing a laser does, as has been proven over and over, is this: it gives you accuracy, much like taking your sights and extending a line from to the sights to the threat. Lasers give you that actual accuracy point projected on your threat. You don't have to have a linear alignment between eyeballs, rear sight, front sight, and target. As long as you can see the dot, even if it's like this *[points over his shoulder]* and in your peripheral vision over your shoulder, you can see the dot; you can shoot. I can get to about seven o'clock on one side and I can get to about five on the other. That six o'clock area between five and seven is hard.

**eJournal:** Right. And you still need to be able to see enough to make some judgment calls. I remember you shooting behind riot shields without your eyes behind the gun sights. Well done for leveraging technology to serve a current need.

I would like to see you mentoring and sharing that with others. Please tell me about reaching out beyond your goals and dreams for [ChairRider.com](http://ChairRider.com)'s website. Will you teach classes? Can we come take a wheelchair shooting class from Clyde Caceres? An instructor-level class? Where is this going? What's your dream and what's ahead for you?

**Caceres:** [Chairrider.com](http://Chairrider.com) is my mission to help wounded veterans, injured first responders, or anybody in a chair who is mobility-restricted. What's ahead for me? Information transmission. Ahead is, hopefully, several nonprofits that I've started

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to ally with who are mostly doing work for veterans, but not always. There's a fishing nonprofit up in the Great Lakes that's doing a fishing excursion for anybody in wheelchairs. I am supporting them, and I hope to have them support what I do.

I want to seek out nonprofits that need alliances and help them so that ChairRider.com becomes be a nexus for nonprofit information where anybody in a wheelchair can go to explore. Maybe you wonder how to garden from a wheelchair, so you go to ChairRider.com and find a Gardening Wheelchair Club and from there you learn what you need to know. I want to collate a list of nonprofits, so I'm asking everybody out there, if you know of organizations, nonprofits that are helping people, vets or otherwise, to help expand the horizons of being in a wheelchair, please contact me at <https://chairrider.com/contact-us> and help me gather that all together. I would like to give people the ability to find missions, to do more than just sit around, to get out and do things, to do things productively, to do things with heart.

**eJournal:** The more we are active and fully engaged in life, the more pertinent your specialty of the self defense becomes to us, because now we are going out in public and wonder, "What if I run into someone who wants to do me harm?" Clyde, I would love to see you make videos on that subject and teach classes, so keep us in the loop. I am inspired by your attitude, and others will be, too. What's the takeaway you'd like to leave us with?

**Caceres:** While our audience may not be mobility restricted, there are more and more people that are, whether it's a family member or someone they used to work with, someone at their golf club, wherever it might be. Just try and be motivational with them. It's tough. Someone in a wheelchair might say, "Well, easy for you," but be positive with them.

To people that are in a chair, I would say, be positive with people you engage with. A lot of times people that are in a chair get flustered because they feel they're being stared at and get

offended. Well, I get that. Kids will stare. You know, you are different looking. I mean, not everybody's running around on wheels.

I used to be 5' 6", now I'm 3' 10", so I'm pretty short right now. I'm below most people's eye level, so people are going to be surprised and say, "Oh, where'd he come from?" and I'm sure they're thinking, "I wonder what happened to him?" They change their gaze because they realize they're staring at you. A lot of wheelchair people get offended by all that. Just go with it. Engage people, greet them, say, "Hi, how you doing?" Let people ask questions if they want to.

I encourage anyone with contact with somebody with reduced mobility to point them in directions where they can become more positive. If they are upset about where they are, find ways to be more positive about it. The first article I put on our ChairRider.com [newsletter](#) was about finding missions. Remember my first ones were open my wallet and get things out and wipe my own butt. Now the missions are getting bigger and a little bit more difficult to achieve. So, if I can shamelessly say it, please go to ChairRider.com see what we do. I'm proud to have listed Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network as one of our partners.

**eJournal:** We're proud to have you on board with us, Clyde, and we want to do what we can to share the word. We want people to plug into the great resource that you are, because again, as we said at the beginning, folks, we're talking with someone who's got lifetime martial arts skills, somebody who is a highly skilled shooter and is working to adapt these skills for wheelchair users.

Reach out to Clyde at <https://chairrider.com/contact-us>. He wants to be a resource to you, and we want him to be, because I think, even if it sounds odd to say it, the future's bright. There are many people who have enormous needs out there. Clyde, please stay in touch with me and let me know how you're doing; let me know how we can be part of it.



## President's Message

by Marty Hayes, J.D.

It was the late, great Jeff Cooper, founder of Gunsite Academy, who coined the phrase "Problem Two." He was referring to the fact that in any self-defense confrontation/incident, there were two problems one needed to survive. Problem One was surviving the life-threatening event, and Problem Two referred to surviving the legal aftermath of using force in self defense.

I first considered this dual problem back in the late 1980s when I first started teaching private citizens how to use handguns for self defense. Before my first class as an instructor, I promised myself I would not teach people how to use guns in self defense, unless I also taught them WHEN to use them in self defense. I continued this promise until 2022, when I sold the Firearms Academy of Seattle to one of my brightest students, Belle McCormack. I am heartened to learn that she has continued this practice.

In the time between 1988 and 2022, individuals and schools offering firearms training for the private sector has grown exponentially, to the point where it would be impossible to name all the instructors and programs currently in the marketplace. While that's generally a good thing, there is one glaring draw-

back. The vast majority of current instructors do not sufficiently address Problem Two in their offerings.

During the time I was teaching, I had the opportunity to not only enroll and take training from many of the top instructors in the country, but to also audit many more programs. In more than one program I heard, "I don't teach the law; I teach gunfighting." That would have been all well and good, assuming the student had access to instructors who did teach the law and was taught how to handle the legal aftermath of a self-defense shooting. The biggest problem arises when these instructors take in beginning students. It might well be that the student never gets to another class that teaches about Problem Two before they are faced with Problem One.

Early on in my teaching career, I was fortunate to have two mentors. The first was not actually an individual, but instead, I benefitted from competent law enforcement training, when I began carrying a gun for work all the way back in 1978. I was taught about "ability" "opportunity" and "jeopardy" (AOJ) and so, when I began my teaching career, I fashioned a class outline using that model of when a person can use force in self defense. I figured if it was good enough for the cops, it ought to hold up for the private citizen.

Three years later, in 1990, I started training with Massad Ayoob and the Lethal Force Institute. A couple things immediately came out of that experience. First off, I was gratified to learn he also taught AOJ to his civilian students. Secondly, I learned there was much more to justified use of force in self defense than just AOJ. There are also legal principals such as duty to retreat, stand your ground, disparity of force, and post shooting trauma, to name only a few of the new details he taught.

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We expect firearms instructors to have high levels of shooting skills, as demonstrated by Firearms Academy of Seattle Director Belle McCormack above, left. Instructors also need knowledge of and ability to teach about Problem Two, as illustrated above, right, where Belle is testifying in a Deadly Force Instructor mock trial, with Attorney Brian Hallaq, on the right, acting as judge.

During the next 30+ years, I also learned that the legal system wasn't necessarily a just system, discovering that despite armed citizens being perfectly justified in using deadly force in self defense, innocent people were being prosecuted at an alarming rate. Again, thanks to Ayoob, I learned that there was more to just being right; one also had to be able to prove he or she was right.

After my first class with Ayoob, I came to the realization that I was extremely deficient in my knowledge about Problem Two, so I convinced him to take me on as an assistant instructor, where I could study the problem under him, and pay him back by assisting him in teaching the Problem One aspect of use of force in self defense.

In 1998, I convinced Ayoob to start teaching instructor-level Deadly Force Instructor certification courses, and I helped design and implement the curriculum for the first such class, which we held at The Firearms Academy of Seattle. That was 25 years ago, and since then, we have taught an estimated 15-20 such certification courses, with an estimated 300+ graduates, all either police firearms instructors or instructors active in the civilian sector.

This column isn't a history lesson or a session of me patting myself on the back. I write it hoping it might serve as a wake-up call to the thousands of instructors who teach basic firearms use. Have you made a personal assessment, asking, are you doing enough to teach your students the rules of the road when it comes to use of force in self-defense? If not, why? You are

going to feel pretty terrible for a long time when one of your students screws up and ends up in prison because of an error which you might have been able to stop him or her from committing if you had provided students with a little legal education. These people are trusting you to teach them what they need to know. Are you fulfilling your responsibilities?

There are only two places for you to get certified to teach use of deadly force in self defense. One, is of course through the Mas-sad Ayoob Group <https://massadayoobgroup.com/> . As you read this, I will be preparing to travel to Phoenix AZ to teach the course with Ayoob. In fact, it was preparing to teach this course which spurred me to write about this subject this time. While it is likely too late to sign up for the Phoenix course, it is not too late to make the one we are offering at The Firearms Academy of Seattle, in July. Read more at <https://firearmsacademy.com/guest-instructors/deadly-force-instructor-washington> . These are the only two scheduled this year.

I also mentioned another place to receive this education and certification, and that is through attorney Andrew Branca's Law of Self-Defense courses. I have been acquainted with Andrew for many years and know his material to be first rate. He has an on-line certification course which comes highly recommended, and I would suggest you check it out at <https://lawofselfdefense.com/product/instructor-program/> .

That covers my message for this month, and I hope it reaches at least a few of you, and you move forward to expand your knowledge in this critical area. Your students will appreciate it.



## Attorney Question of the Month

In 2023, three Network members defended themselves, called on the Network, and we paid attorneys to represent them. Two had selected attorneys in advance; for one, we contacted several attorneys before finding a lawyer to provide representation.

The experiences put the spotlight on reasons armed citizens prefer to meet with an attorney and work out in advance how to contact them for help after self defense. It is not as easy as it sounds! When Network members contact attorneys, the responses range from “come by my office for a few minutes” to “buy me breakfast and we’ll talk” to “call us after something has happened.” Every law firm operates a little differently, so we alert members that attorneys may need to charge members for consultations, especially for meetings lasting more than a few minutes. In the following pages, we share the last of the many responses received to [February’s Attorney Question of the Month](#), when we asked our Affiliated Attorneys the following questions:

***Do you speak with armed citizens who don’t have an immediate need for representation but want to be prepared?***

***If an armed citizen wants to meet you briefly, do you prefer a phone call, Zoom or other Internet meeting, or to talk in person?***

***How should a member contact you for a brief meeting (telephone, in person, email)?***

To avoid repeating the question for each response, we separated the questions and have three segments in which the attorneys respond. Only the first set of responses give full contact details for the responding attorney.

***Question: Do you speak with armed citizens who don’t have an immediate need for representation but want to be prepared?***

**Alex M. Ooley & E. Michael Ooley**  
Ooley Law, LLC  
P.O. Box 70, Borden, IN 47106  
812-810-1234  
<https://ooleylaw.com/>

Yes, we periodically meet armed citizens who are concerned about having legal representation with respect to a self-defense

encounter should the need arise. We appreciate the preparedness mindset and welcome communication in the manner that is most convenient to the member to discuss any individualized concerns.

We appreciate the responsible armed citizen taking action to limit the effects of any potential aftermath, including legal aftermath, and having a relationship with an attorney knowledgeable in self-defense law ahead of time can be very beneficial.

**Katherine A. Decker, Esq.**

Foundations Law, PLLC  
P.O. Box 12002, Lynchburg, VA 24506-2002  
434-841-9790  
<https://foundationslawfirm.com/>

Yes, I will.

**Mark B. Bullman**

Bullman Law  
1200 Altmore Ave Ste 120, Atlanta, GA 30342  
844-331-5180  
<https://www.bullmanlawgroup.com/>

We are happy to speak to anyone about basic rights, such as not talking with police after an incident other than to provide basic information until they have spoken with an attorney, even if they did absolutely nothing wrong, etc.

**Miva VanEngen, Esq.**

VanEngen Law Office, P.C.  
1802 Dearborn Ave, Suite 202, Missoula, MT 59801  
406-214-3978  
<https://vanenglaw.com/>

Yes.

**Duane A. Daiker**

Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick, LLP  
Bank of America Plaza, Suite 2800  
101 East Kennedy Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33602  
813-227-2329  
<https://www.shumaker.com/professionals/A-D/duane-a-daiker>

I have had a number of Network members reach out to me just to make a connection. I am always happy to do that.

**Steven Oberman**

Oberman & Rice, Trial Attorneys  
550 Main Street, Suite 730, Knoxville, TN 37902  
865-249-7200  
<https://www.tndui.com/>

Of course.

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**Jaimie Washo Spivey, Esq.**

The Washo Law Firm, P.A.  
535 W. Main St. Tavares, FL 32778  
138 Bushnell Plaza, Suite 300, Bushnell, FL 33513  
352-253-2244  
<https://thewasholawfirm.com/>

Yes, they typically call me after they are given my name by the Network.

**Travis J. Groat**

Attorney at Law  
422 E. Mitchell Street, Unit 4B, Petoskey, MI 49770  
231-373-8886  
<https://groatlawpllc.com/>

I prefer phone calls. I have had two people contact me to simply discuss concerns and how to reach me if needed, without an immediate need of anything in particular. I was able to take those calls as they came in, without the need to schedule anything.

**Keith H. Rutman**

Attorney at Law  
402 West Broadway, Suite 1560, San Diego, CA. 92101-8534  
619-237-9072  
<https://krutmanlaw.com/>

Yes.

**Thomas S. Hale**

505 20th St N., Birmingham, AL 35203  
205-453-9800  
<https://www.halesides.com/>

Yes, I will speak with armed citizens who wish to be prepared, although I do not practice criminal law per se, but do defend any civil actions resulting from a 2nd Amendment incident.

**John R. Monroe**

John Monroe Law, PC  
156 Robert Jones Road, Dawsonville, GA 30534  
678-362-7650  
<http://johnmonroelaw.com>

Yes, I speak with armed citizens without an immediate need for legal services (assuming they have reached out to me).

**Ralph D. Sherman**

130 West Main Street, New Britain, CT 06052  
(860) 229-0213  
<http://www.ralphdsheer.com/>

Yes.

**Christopher H. Cessna**

CessnaLaw, LLC.  
7314 Ralston Road, Arvada, CO 80002  
303-456-1600  
<https://www.cessnalaw.com/>

I am happy to take calls and chat with members in Colorado even before any incident may arise.

**Fred L. Abrams, Esq.**

Attorney at Law  
31 West 34th Street, No. 8133, New York, NY 10001  
212-766-7275  
<https://www.fredabramslaw.com/>

Yes. This is important to explain to the client how to interact with law enforcement if the client is approached by law enforcement because of an incident involving the client's suspected wrongdoing. To cite just one example, unless I am present (and am able to first confer with the client), the client should not make any statements to law enforcement about the incident.

Here is a tip for private citizens with CCW permits from out of NY State who intend to bring their handguns while vacationing in NYC or elsewhere in NY State. Concerning handgun licenses, there is no reciprocity between NYS (or NYC), and any other state. So, if you are a private citizen on a vacation visiting NY (and you bring your handgun from your home state into NY), you will face felony charges if you are arrested.

The exception to this fact pattern that applies to private citizens, would be that the handgun you bring with you on your vacation in NY is already registered in NY and is listed on a NY Penal Law Section 400 handgun license issued to you by governmental authorities in NY. In other words, at the time of your vacation in NY, you have a NY-issued handgun license with the gun you bring into NY listed on it.

Another exception could be that you are a retired law enforcement officer covered by LEOSA (and there are other exceptions as well that mostly apply to government officials like active law enforcement officers, etc.). Last month I represented a private citizen/client in Manhattan Criminal Court—where gun cases are handled at 100 Centre Street, in a special courtroom/special “part” dedicated to presiding over just gun cases. The client had a CCW permit from his/her home state and brought the gun into Manhattan, wrongly thinking there was reciprocity.

*[Continued next page]*

**Carl Jensen**

410 Central Avenue, Suite 506B, Great Falls, MT 59401  
406-899-6696

<https://www.carlbjensenjr.com>

I speak with armed citizens if they have questions or concerns, even if don't have an immediate need.

**James D. "Mitch" Vilos**

Attorney at Law, P.C.  
P.O. Box 1148, Centerville, Utah 84014  
801-560-7117

<https://mitchvilos.com/>

My first encounter with a law professor my first year in law school referred to the practice of law as "The Jealous Mistress." After trying my first few cases, I found out what he meant. When you are dedicated to winning, you tend to pour as many hours into your cases as you can to boost the chances of winning to the greatest extent. Time with your wife, your children and grandchildren suffers.

I do not see the need to meet with clients before an incident. Given the above truth, I would think clients who understand the time issue would want us to devote our time to their case rather than chit-chatting beforehand. I care deeply about each client who trusts me with his or her legal issue. I want to be able to spend more time on their case than less time. Anything that detracts from that is unnecessary and possibly detrimental, IMHO.

Incidentally, with few possible exceptions, I consider every client I have ever represented a friend. I believe most have felt that from me.

I understand others may feel differently and I respect that.

**Adam Dowling**

Eng & Woods  
903 E Ash St, Columbia, MO 65201  
573-874-4190

<https://www.engandwoods.com/attorney-profile/adam-dowling/>

Yes.

**Damon Rogers, Esq.**

ROGERS | BELTRAN LLP  
6700 Fallbrook Avenue, Suite 100, Los Angeles, CA 91307  
213-900-9004

<https://rogersbeltran.com/>

Yes.

**Larry P. McDougal**

The Law Office of Larry P. McDougal  
809 Houston St., Richmond, TX 77469  
281-238-8500

<https://www.larrymcdougal.com/about/larry-p-mcdougal-sr/>

I have had a couple come by the office, but I have had more just call me on the phone and talk for about 10-15 minutes.

**Craig R. Johnson**

Craig Johnson Law, PLLC  
2500 N. University Ave., Provo, UT 84604  
801-458-2285

<https://craigjohnsonlaw.com/>

Yes, 100%.

**Benjamin Blatt**

P.O. Box 221, South Bend, IN 46624  
574-360-4039

<https://www.facebook.com/hoosierattorney>

Yes. Frequently as referrals from local shops. Sometimes speaking to local shooting clubs or groups.

**Larry Mertes**

Lawrence S. Mertes, P.C.  
1325 Dry Creek Dr., Ste 201, Longmont, CO 80503  
303-440-0123

<https://merteslaw.com/>

Yes.

**Question: If an armed citizen wants to meet you briefly, do you prefer a phone call, Zoom or other Internet meeting, or to talk in person?**

**Katherine A. Decker, Esq., Lynchburg, VA**

I prefer a phone call; I will chat 10-15 minutes at no cost. If they wish to meet in person or over Zoom, I would charge them a consultation fee.

**Alex M. Ooley & E. Michael Ooley, Borden, IN**

If someone is interested in scheduling a telephone call, a Zoom meeting, or an in-person meeting, we'd suggest that they send us an email so that we can schedule a brief meeting.

**Mark B. Bullman, Atlanta, GA**

Just depends on where the person is and the purpose of their call/meet.

**Miva VanEngen, Esq., Missoula, MT**

I like to start with a phone call.

[Continued next page]

**Duane A. Daiker, Tampa, FL**

I prefer they send me an email so we can schedule.

**Steven Oberman, Knoxville, TN**

It is the client's preference. We believe communication with a client is of the utmost importance.

**Jaimie Washo Spivey, Esq., Tavares, FL**

I prefer a phone call but over the internet is fine too.

**Travis J. Groat, Petoskey, MI**

I prefer phone calls as they take up less time. If someone comes in, I have to block off a full hour. With a phone call, I can block off 15 minutes.

**Keith H. Rutman, San Diego, CA**

Depends upon my availability. All are viable options.

**Thomas S. Hale, Birmingham, AL**

I prefer to meet in person, but if it is more convenient for the member to do a Zoom conference, that is my second preference, then a phone call as explained below.

**John R. Monroe, Dawsonville, GA**

The mode of a meeting is variable, depending on the needs of the client. Some people just want to say hi and have a name and phone number for emergencies, in which case a phone call or video call is adequate (and I will mail the member business cards to keep handy). Others have questions, about how things work, what to expect, etc., in which case a face-to-face meeting may be more appropriate. I don't generally charge for the former, but I do for the latter, because I have to block out time on my calendar and keep records/notes from the meeting.

**Ralph D. Sherman, New Britain, CT**

Phone.

**Fred L. Abrams, Esq., New York, NY**

I prefer a phone call via my office number: 212-766-7275

**Carl Jensen Great Falls, MT**

They can call or email me, and I'm happy to speak over the phone, video or in person.

**Adam Dowling, Columbia, MO**

Phone is my preference, but I'm happy to schedule an in-person appointment.

**Damon Rogers, Esq., Los Angeles, CA**

Phone or Zoom.

**Craig R. Johnson, Provo, UT**

Due to my busy court schedule, it is easier for me to take a phone call driving to and from hearings.

**Benjamin Blatt, South Bend, IN**

Generally, I prefer to just talk over the phone, but I've done Zoom calls, and traveled to talk to small groups in neighboring counties. I'm flexible to an extent about working within the limitations of the person requesting information.

**Larry Mertes, Longmont, CO**

To simply answer questions, mostly by email or phone, sometimes by Zoom. If it is an urgent and on-going crisis, I'm at the jail or with my potential client where they need me most.

**Question: How should a member contact you for a brief meeting (telephone, in person, email)?**

**Alex M. Ooley & E. Michael Ooley, Borden, IN**

They can contact us directly by email at [info@ooleylaw.com](mailto:info@ooleylaw.com) or through the contact form on our website at <https://ooleylaw.com/contact/>.

**Katherine A. Decker, Esq., Lynchburg, VA**

Email.

**Mark B. Bullman, Atlanta, GA 30342**

Email first is usually best, but even if someone leaves a voice mail, we make it a point to call people back within 24 hours (some weekends and holidays it might be a bit longer, unless it is an emergency).

As a quick, general follow up, my partner and I are former law enforcement, so we generally do not handle criminal cases (just personal preference and because we are generally pro-law enforcement). However, we handle cases involving police misconduct focusing on civil rights. (Unfortunately, we have a good bit of policing issues in metro-Atlanta.) We also are willing to represent police officers who are wrongly pursued. So, while we don't handle criminal cases, we do have a number of criminal attorneys we work with somewhat regularly, and we are happy to help with constitutional issues.

**Miva VanEngen, Esq., Missoula, MT**

Phone call.

**Duane A. Daiker, Tampa, FL**

We can schedule a no-charge telephone conference at a convenient time. I will share my cell phone number with them, and assure them that if I am not available, I have someone in my firm who will cover for me. I record their essential information and a few relevant details about them in my contact list so that if I receive a call on my cell phone, it doesn't come up as a dreaded "unknown" number. Some of the members reach out to me every year when they renew their membership, just to make sure I'm still available, which I appreciate.

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**Steven Oberman, Knoxville, TN**

Telephone is preferred to avoid any miscommunication.

**Jaimie Washo Spivey, Esq., Tavares, FL**

Telephone or email is always best.

**Keith H. Rutman, San Diego, CA**

Email details, then I'll follow up with a call.

**Thomas S. Hale, Birmingham, AL**

The best way to reach me quickly is through a call to my direct dial number 205-453-9242, and if I do not answer right away, to please leave a message with a name and good number and I will return the call as soon as possible. Email is also okay ([thale@halesides.com](mailto:thale@halesides.com)) but that is risky, since I get so many spam mails every day, often 100 or more, and I rapidly delete them in bulk and may overlook a legitimate message.

**John R. Monroe, Dawsonville, GA**

I'm indifferent how a member contacts me. If it is not urgent, though, usually email is a good way to get the relationship started, because people can correspond via email not in real time.

**Ralph D. Sherman, New Britain, CT**

Phone or email.

**Fred L. Abrams, Esq., New York, NY**

A client can email me at [fred@fredabramslaw.com](mailto:fred@fredabramslaw.com) to set up a brief "meeting" by phone.

**Adam Dowling, Columbia, MO**

Any of those methods are fine to contact me.

**Damon Rogers, Esq., Los Angeles, CA**

Email is best, and provide the member's contact information (name, email, phone number).

**Craig R. Johnson, Provo, UT**

Text or email and we can set up a call.

**Benjamin Blatt, South Bend, IN**

I prefer contact by phone or email. If you see me in person and I'm not specifically at a location to talk about the subject, I'm probably in court working on someone else's legal issues, or out and about on personal time. I don't really do office hours/walk-ins, but I answer my phone and email regularly.

**Larry Mertes, Longmont, CO**

An email works for simple questions, we can follow up for a conversation as needed.

*Thank you, affiliated attorneys, for sharing your thoughts about members contacting attorneys. Members, please return next month when we have a new question topic.*

## Book Review

### ***Walls, Wires, Bars and Souls***

By Peter Grant

Paperback 294 pages, \$13.24 or

Kindle eBook for \$3.99

ISBN-13 978-0615884394

Publisher: Fynbos Press, Sept. 2013

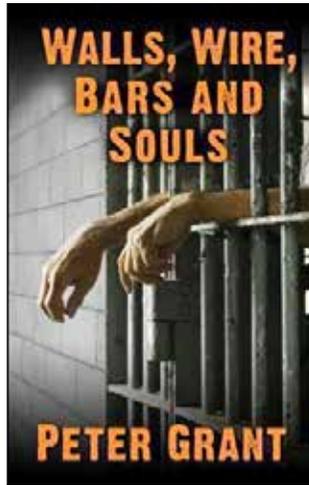
*Reviewed by Gila Hayes*

Who better to help ordinary, good citizens understand criminals than a prison chaplain? I was interested when I ran across a book by Peter Grant that promised to “try to give an accurate and unvarnished picture of what it’s like to work in a high-security penitentiary, surrounded by some of the most violent and dangerous criminals in the United States.” After injury forced the author into medical retirement, he expressed his need to still contribute to public safety by writing *Walls, Wire, Bars and Souls*. In it, he notes that in spite of studies that try to paint profiles of incarcerated criminals, “how an inmate’s mind works” is hard for most to understand.

Prisons, Grant opines, are essentially a hidden world, kept out of sight and unknown to most. Serving as chaplain, he understood the need for unflinching alertness to ill intent from the men he ministered to, recalling, “It’s a sure bet that one or more convicts will be watching ... and will seize the opportunity to take advantage of ... me.” He observes that “shepherds of the flock...sometimes have to deal with the wolves,” and he and others in the ministry “have neither moral qualms nor compunction of conscience about arming themselves,” adding, “rightly so, in my opinion.” His common-sense opinion increased my respect for him. This is no “love fixes everything” preacher. He’s seen evil and resolved not to let it dominate.

Grant writes that prison staff learn never to trust the inmates, although he strives to present a fair picture for readers. He describes charming, friendly men, some educated, others not. One he describes is a former prison guard who fell afoul of a blackmail scheme an inmate ran on him, but is himself “manipulative and untrustworthy.” Many assert innocence or claim they were victims of masterminds who directed their crimes. He writes that “the most common factor” is that “It’s never their fault, never their responsibility.” Those who won’t accept responsibility are likely to be repeat offenders, he adds.

Grant writes short stories of interactions with common types of inmates, including the perpetual victim who will “try a sob story on me from time to time, and I’ll look at him tiredly and say ‘Not again, Rodney?’ Then he’ll chuckle, hang his head, shuffle his feet, and admit that he’s after a favor.” Another lies with impunity, but dons “a mask of injured innocence when you call him on it.” Several refuse to express any remorse or guilt, and several others blame anyone but themselves for the circumstances that



landed them in prison.

One is a religious fanatic, a foreigner, whose religious fervor often puts him at odds with inmates of the same faith. A gang king pin continues to wield great power from inside prison, despite growing old there. Grant also writes of the convicts he finds truly frightening, who killed without compunction and would happily do so again.

“There are tens of thousands more like them in prisons all across the country: and for every one behind bars, there are probably five to ten out there on the street. I’ve often thought that those who are uneasy at the prospect of citizens owning and carrying firearms would do well to spend a day or two observing the criminals inside the walls of a high- or maximum-security institution, and reading the details of their crimes,” he comments.

Some chapters read as if the prisoners are describing themselves. One is an older convict, who sees his physical prowess slipping, and in order to maintain his position at the top of the hierarchy, explains that if threatened, “I’m gonna hurt you real bad. No other way. I don’t fight fair. I’m older now, and I don’t have the strength and speed I used to have, so I fight hard and I fight dirty and I know all the tricks. I fight for keeps.”

After a chapter describing the stringent procedures to keep high security prisons functioning, Grant comments “that criminals have a fundamentally different perspective on life” than ordinary people expect. This is most apparent in the serious offenders because, “the more crimes he’s committed, the more often he’s been incarcerated, the more these traits will be evident in his personality and actions.”

Rarely, he states, are crimes the result of psychological or psychiatric problems, which may influence but generally don’t cause criminal behavior. Most inmates know right from wrong, can practice self control and are not insane, he stresses. While “environment and circumstances” factor into becoming a criminal, Grant believes they are not the “root of criminal behavior.” Instead, his experience identifies a combination of “personality traits, attitudes or perspectives on life that...are almost always present in inmates.” He lists the following:

- Selfishness.
- A manipulative approach to relationships.
- Refusal to accept responsibility.
- A sense of superiority.
- A quest for power and authority.
- A need for excitement.
- Inability to feel guilt.
- Compartmentalization.
- A state of perpetual anger.
- A refusal to accept reality.

Inside prison, inmates practice their own code of conduct through which big numbers of people with the foregoing personality traits can coexist. A prisoner is expected to be loyal

*[Continued next page]*

to their prison gang or religious group, even over his family. One must mind his own business, and know and behave according to his status in the hierarchy of convicts, never disrespecting one of the same or higher status. The inmate code of behavior, Grant explains, is “almost exaggerated” but only extended to equals or more dangerous convicts, and doesn’t apply to correctional officers, of course.

Grant ponders rehabilitation. With a few notable exceptions, “many prison ‘rehabilitation’ programs are in reality purely general education or training courses. They’re designed to address deficiencies in knowledge or employment skills, but they don’t confront the inmate’s personality.” He tells the story of an inmate who had “committed virtually every crime in the book.” Two years of counseling led him to acknowledge God, admit sins, courageously face the truth and learn objectivity. “He slowly but surely completed a really thorough examination of his own personality — and he came to loathe what he saw.”

This transformation involved repentance, reform and rebuilding, Grant explains. It healed the inmate’s personality, taught him how thought leads to action and to recognize “any wayward ideas before they could take over his train of thought.” The reformation succeeded, but most inmates are not serious about changing, prisons are not set up for “genuine reform and rehabilitation,” and society at large denies that truth is not “subjective and variable” so popular treatments are ineffective. First time offenders may respond to “scared straight” experiences, but they differ considerably from the repeat offenders with whom Grant has experience.

Criminal behavior continues inside prison. Grant outlines illegal inmate activities ranging from making, selling and drinking alcohol, theft, sex and prostitution, gambling, and drugs. The chaplain intersperses his observations about prison culture and inmates with chapters paraphrasing inmates’ conversations justifying or minimizing their crimes both inside and out. Evil in a high-security prison is palpable, and few fight it. Grant writes, “we can predict with confidence that two out of every three convicts will commit further offenses after leaving prison...There may be more who’ll re-offend, but who won’t be caught...If we can turn a criminal from his path, we’ve saved not only him, but also everyone who would have become his victims, had he gone on to commit more crimes.”

Grant outlines how inmates exploit special considerations granted for religious practices; court rulings against racial discrimination are likewise misused. Gang affiliations function both inside and outside prison, and the chaplain profiles the prominent ones. In prisons, gangs enforce their leaders’ will by extortion via “protection rackets,” run the gambling, drug trade, punish inmates or harm families on the outside, if they still have families.

Many inmates, coming from highly dysfunctional families, no longer have ties to family. Grant stresses that, while standing by his core believe that each individual is responsible for his

or her own decisions and actions, “it’s very difficult to make responsible choices when the only examples you’ve ever known are of outrageous irresponsibility.” Broken families, welfare and entitlements that disincentive personal responsibility, and unimaginable home lives experienced as young children contribute to criminality.

Does incarceration work and why do we put so many people in prison? Grant explores the necessity to protect society. He counters idealistic rhetoric about inmate programs for drug addiction, mental health treatment, education, vocational training or other opportunities for self improvement, psychological treatment for child sex abusers, and hopes to eliminate predatory behavior which “usually makes correction staff laugh out loud.” Instead, *Walls, Wire, Bars, and Souls* encourages a realistic look at prisons and prisoners, asking why two out of three inmates returned to prison after they re-offend. Reform is bigger than career training or building more humane prisons.

Grant thinks that laws like sentencing enhancements for gun possession during a non-violent crime or lengthier sentences for dealing one form of a drug over another are harmful. On the other hand, repeat offenses should earn not only a return to prison, but lengthy, even life sentences, he believes. Change starts long before the chaplain has to try to reform the prisoner. Better parenting is needed to teach self control, he continues. Law enforcement, prosecutors and the judicial system need to divert mentally ill offenders into treatment. He writes that juvenile offenders would benefit enormously by sentencing into a hard-working, regimented service corps, instead of jails.

Through the chapters Grant shares his experiences as a prison chaplain, along with the story of the convict who did change and maintained his transformation. He also details the final hours of an older inmate, once a vicious criminal, who dies of heart failure. He writes of the correctional officers providing care for those and other inmates. “As you go about your daily life, spare a thought for those who are keeping you safe by ensuring that the bad guys stay locked up. Think of the former criminals who have genuinely reformed, and are struggling to make new lives for themselves in a world that’s very seldom sympathetic and supportive towards them,” he pleads.

Think also of the unrepentant, he urges. “Pray that they don’t decide to pick you for their next target. Learn to protect and defend yourself in case they do — including equipping yourself with suitable and effective tools. Don’t trust the minimalist panacea ‘solutions’ touted by many. Violent assault isn’t easily stopped, certainly not by whistles, or screams, or martial arts, or running fast, or calling 911. Even measures such as pepper spray aren’t foolproof — I’ve seen hardened convicts eat the stuff, and keep coming. Your safety is in your own hands, no-one else’s. Be watchful, and be careful. I know all too well how many violent criminals are released from prison each year. I don’t want you to be their next victim.”

I found *Walls, Wire, Bars, and Souls* a compelling book and am glad I ran across it.



## Editor's Notebook

### Coming to a City Near You

by Gila Hayes

Between the upcoming general election, strong feelings about politics, race, abortion, support for Israel, Palestine or Ukraine, or any of the other emotional topics ranging from economics to the

environment, spring will bring with it a resurgence of demonstrations and rallies. Before grabbing your placard and heading down to the public square, ask yourself these questions:

Is attending worth my life?

Does a demonstration really influence public opinion?

Can I wield greater influence in some other way?

Memories are fading of the lawless summer months of 2020 that put the spotlight on violent protests. Now, as people want to go back into the streets, some deny the risk that others who hold opposing opinions may decide to fight them. After all, BLM is no longer making the news; the anarchists in the big cities aren't rioting and fighting police every weekend. As spring nears, consider reports from the end of last year and ask yourself if the danger truly has abated.

Researcher John Lott publishes information on defensive gun use that regularly catches my attention. In part of his extensive website ([crimeresearch.org](https://crimeresearch.org)), he posts thumbnail sketches of defensive gun uses by private citizens. The numbers for which he is finding news reports run 20 to 25 a month, from what I can see. While I know the reality of under reporting about legitimate self defense in the general news stream and secondly, acknowledging the reality that many survivors simply will not call police after using a gun without shooting to stop an attack, I like to read his research.

Lott's end-of-2023 report at <https://crimeresearch.org/2024/01/defensive-gun-uses-by-people-legally-carrying-guns-25-cases-during-october-2023/> got me thinking about the coming spring and summer rallies and demonstrations. His reports mentioned two incidents that led me to ponder the topic.

One involved shots fired when pro-Palestinian demonstrators mobbed an Israel solidarity event in a Chicago suburb. Police and prosecutors decline to charge the shooter, acknowledging the necessity for self defense, I was happily surprised to read.

Guns came out at a similar demonstration in Eugene, OR, where a Free Palestine march was blocked by a masked counter-protester who jumped out of his truck when someone reportedly slashed one of his truck's tires. He fired into the oncoming crowd with what was later claimed to be only a

realistic-looking splatter ball gun, but the guns pointed at him by two other marchers were very real indeed.

I am surprised that the Oregon incident didn't devolve into shots fired, in light of the strong emotions expressed by all the factions involved. Don't underestimate the chaos sure to be present when large numbers of emotional people tangle! A man was shot in New Mexico in late September when angry demonstrators fought about a statue of an historic figure, of all things!

As armed citizens, we tend to focus on defensive gun use, and ignore – to our detriment, I fear – the simple danger of being trampled or physically assaulted or even hurt by thrown objects when a melee erupts over such emotional issues as happened in mid-November outside the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Look for more politicized violence as the election nears. Right now, Israel's fight to eliminate Hamas – and America's response – is fueling most of the demonstrations, some of which turn violent. In the months to come, the general election looms large.

Will presidential hopeful Donald Trump be convicted before the general election? That could get interesting. *City Journal* columnist Christopher Rufo warned in December of violence from "both sides of the ideological divide" should Trump be convicted and jailed. Beyond that potential flash point, conditions are ripe for another season of riots. The same columnist wrote, "Progressives are restless and ready. Left-wing activists have established a constellation of institutions to support public demonstrations. Protest NGOs, media entities, research centers, black-bloc (Antifa) networks, and bail funds are all finely tuned to mobilize mass movements. The Left carefully manages its licit and illicit factions: progressive political leaders tacitly delegate the dirty work to anarchist and racist factions, which can change costumes—for example, from a BLM mask to a Palestinian keffiyeh—at any moment." (See <https://www.city-journal.org/article/will-it-be-riot-season-again-in-2024>)

Right now, before the firestorm of big demonstrations and rallies-turned-into-riots re-ignites, it is the time to think through questions of "what's right" and "what's productive." Demagogues, preachers, charismatic business leaders, politicians and others in position of influence love to stir up emotions and feelings of responsibility to "create change." They're going to be fine! Their protection details are nearby to whisk them away when the first brick or bottle gets thrown or the first shot rings out. If you're shoulder-to-shoulder with a mass of screaming people, or even on the outskirts of the crowd when it turns and runs in your direction, you may not be as well-off as the leader who encouraged you to be there.

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